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SUBJECT: AT MEETING WITH MEMBER STATES, DG OUTLINES
ROLE OF UNESCO IN EXPANDING TSUNAMI WARNING SYSTEM

1. Summary: In a February 10 meeting with representatives of member states, DG Matsuura reported that UNESCO had succeeded in assuming a lead role in coordinating efforts to set up global and regional tsunami warning systems. He outlined a process --

SIPDIS

including a March 3-8 UNESCO/IOC coordination meeting - that will result in the creation of a politically agreed framework for a global system by June 2007. He also set a target date of June 2006 for the realization of a preliminary Indian Ocean Tsunami warning system, with a full-fledged system in place by late 2007. IOC Executive Secretary Patricio Bernal also addressed the group, briefing on the IOC's Pacific tsunami warning system. End Summary.

2. DG Matsuura briefed representatives of member states on his efforts to ensure UNESCO's role as lead agency for the international coordination of global and regional tsunami warning systems, based on the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission's (IOC) role in running the tsunami warning center in the Pacific. Matsuura reported that he had used the Mauritius meeting on Small Island Developing States (January 10-14) to announce a strategy and calendar of key events for the creation of an Indian Ocean tsunami system; in Mauritius, he also outlined a strategy to build a global tsunami warning system that would cover the needs of other at-risk regions, including the Caribbean, the Mediterranean and the South West Pacific. Matsuura saw UNESCO's mandate in this area as also having been enhanced at a special plenary session on the Indian Ocean Disaster at the January 19-22 Kobe Conference on disaster reduction, as well as by the January 29 Ministerial meeting in Phuket.

March 3-8 IOC Coordination Meeting: Regional to Global

3. In this context, Matsuura described the March 3-8 UNESCO/IOC "International Coordinating Meeting for the Development of a Tsunami Warning System for the Indian Ocean" as a means of "harmonizing" initiatives launched by various organizations and countries. Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Indian Ocean countries, as well as IOC focal points in other UNESCO member states, have been requested to encourage the participation of their technical experts.

4. The March coordination meeting will have two objectives: first, to draft a work plan and timetable for creating a tsunami warning and mitigation system for the Indian Ocean. Second, to produce a draft plan for a global tsunami warning system.

5. On the Indian Ocean system, Matsuura predicted that work could proceed quickly, given the consensus among concerned states that such a system is needed, and given the fact that the Indian Ocean Global Ocean Observation system (IGOOS - established in 2002 under UNESCO auspices) can serve as an important foundation for a tsunami early warning system. Matsuura expressed the hope that the March meeting would be followed by an April meeting at the policy level to discuss organizational issues related to an Indian Ocean system, to be presented for approval to the IOC General Assembly meeting in June. In response to questions, Matsuura later clarified that the March conference would likely be followed by a flurry of consultations, to culminate at the April meeting in agreement on a "mechanism for the creation of a new system" and the choice of a location for the regional center. He acknowledged that this might not be an easy process, given the existence of so many alternative proposals.

6. On the global tsunami warning system, Matsuura explained that the March 3-8 conference would not only focus on linkages with existing warning systems and with the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS). There would also be a "ground-up approach": the conference would examine regional components of a

global tsunami warning system. The 2002 UNESCO/IOC proposal for an "Intra-Americas" system would be a focus of discussion, as well as proposals for other at-risk regions, including the Mediterranean, the Atlantic and the South West Pacific. Once agreement is achieved on a draft design for a global system, the next step will be regional coordination meetings: the DG expressed the hope that a planning meeting for the Caribbean would take place during the second half of this year. The DG noted that UNESCO/IOC would also participate in a February 28 meeting organized by the EC's Research Directorate to assess existing networks in the Mediterranean.

17. On timing, Matsuura said that all regional tsunami systems should come under the "umbrella" of the global system; the goal is to have a global system in place by June 2007. He also set a target date of June 2006 for realization of a preliminary Indian Ocean Tsunami warning system, with a full-fledged system in place by late 2007.

18. An important IOC official explained that the June 2007 deadline is for a politically agreed framework for a global tsunami warning system, with elements of certain regional systems - the Caribbean and the SW Pacific -- actually in place. The preliminary Indian Ocean system would be an "interim" solution derived from currently available resources that would integrate instrumentation and networks into existing information systems in Hawaii and Japan. Adhering to a tight timeline is crucial in order to take advantage of current momentum, the IOC official noted.

UNESCO Role in Rebuilding: Education, Water Resources

18. After outlining other UNESCO initiatives in the field of disaster reduction showcased at the Kobe conference, Matsuura discussed UNESCO's role in post-tsunami response efforts. UNESCO's priorities include: proposing temporary alternative educational services; restoring biological and cultural diversity, including archives and libraries; and promoting integrated water management. Administratively, UNESCO is working through its field offices in Bangkok, Jakarta, and New Delhi; the Taskforce on Emergency Response, created by the DG immediately after the tsunami, coordinates efforts. As efforts have shifted from humanitarian emergency activities towards longer-term recovery, the DG has strengthened temporarily the Jakarta field office and created a UNESCO antenna office in Colombo. Evoking financing, the DG expressed thanks for donations to date from member states, and reported the creation of a Tsunami Special Account.

Budget for Tsunami System: TBD

19. Funding issues relating to the establishment of an Indian Ocean Tsunami warning system were evoked when the British Ambassador asked whether the focus on creating a tsunami network might not be in conflict with the recent

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decision to merge the former earth sciences division into two other divisions in the Natural Sciences sector. Matsuura acknowledged that the current budget exercise did not include post-tsunami response activities; however, the draft budget had been adjusted somewhat: the secretariat will propose expenditures of 25 million dollars (as a supplement to the base budget of 610 million dollars to be submitted to the Executive Board) that would include elements to strengthen UNESCO's capacity to tackle disaster prevention.

110. Responding to a question from the Sri Lankan Ambassador on the financing of the tsunami warning system, Matsuura said that the effort - including training of local experts - would require "international assistance." But what counts most at this point, the DG asserted "is the political will to establish and run" such a system. Matsuura noted that UNESCO would fund travel to the March conference for two experts from each concerned developing country.

111. In a side conversation, a high IOC official responded to science officer's query on estimated total cost of a global tsunami warning system by acknowledging that the IOC had at that point had not yet conducted a cost exercise; he was not sure whether it would be better to do so before or after the March 3-8 meeting. He noted that a figure of 30 million dollars over 2-5 years had been evoked, but said that it had "no technical basis."

GOOS Regional Alliances an Important Tsunami Network "Tool"

12. Queried on the role the GOOS (Global Ocean Observation System) regional alliances might play in a new global tsunami warning system, the IOC official responded that the

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regional alliances are an essential "tool" in facilitating contacts among institutions and promoting the implementation of GOOS; he pointed to the Caribbean GOOS as a particularly strong example that could be used as a model. But although the Regional Alliances will certainly play a role in implementing regional tsunami warning networks, they are not meant to be governance structures. For example, improving the means by which tsunami alerts are relayed to citizens - including mounting national structures that are operational 24/7 - represents a crucial challenge. It is a responsibility that can only be shouldered by governments.

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